

THE FIGHTING EIGHTEENTH

~~Early years ago~~, on April 29th, 1915, the 18th Battalion, C.E.F., arrived at West Sandling Camp, Kent, England. Under command of Lieutenant-Colonel E. S. Wigle it had left London, Ontario, for overseas on April 15th, 1915, with a strength of 37 officers and 1,100 other ranks.

Orders for the mobilization of the 18th Battalion, C.E.F., Western Ontario Regiment, had been received at Headquarters, Military District No. 1, London, Ontario, on October 22nd, 1914. The ensuing six months were spent in recruiting and intensive training. The Battalion, 1st infantry unit of the 2nd Canadian Division, sailed on the S.S. "Gramplan" from Halifax on April 17th, 1915, and disembarked at Avonmouth on April 29th.

The months of May, June, July and August, 1915, were spent in Southern England on basic training, battalion, brigade and advanced divisional manoeuvres.

On September 2nd, 1915, the Battalion was inspected by His Majesty, King George V. A few days later Oliver equipment was discarded and replaced by web equipment. British G.S. replaced Canadian vehicles and on September 14th the Battalion, together with the staff of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade, embarked at Folkestone for France. Whilst in mid-channel the transport, an old paddle-wheel steamer, was rammed and disabled by a British destroyer and had to be towed into Boulogne. There were no casualties. Eight men who leaped from the transport to the destroyer were taken back to England and later rejoined the unit in France.

On September 18th there was an inspection by H.R.H. Prince Arthur of Connaught. On September 25th the unit was in the line on the edge of the Battle of Loos. On September 29th the first ration of rum was issued to the troops. In October trenches in front of Vierstraet were occupied.

In March and April of 1916 the Battalion suffered considerable casualties in operations at the Bluff and in the craters of St Eloi. June 1916 saw the unit in the line at Ypres for a period of five weeks without relief.

September of 1916 found the Battalion on the Somme and on the 14th, while moving into position, it was subjected to enemy attack but took off on the morning of the 15th in a large scale offensive which that day achieved all its objectives. Tanks accompanied the Battalion — the first time in history that they had been used in battle. Courcellette and the Sugar Refinery will long be remembered by those who were at the Somme.

After the Somme the Battalion moved north to the Lens sector, where it spent the winter of 1916-17. Colonne, Maroc, Bully Grenoy, Barlin, Hersin-Coupligny and Mont St Eloi were names familiar to men of the unit up until the end of March 1917.

On the night of Easter Sunday, April 8th, 1917, the Battalion moved into position in the front line for the attack on Vimy Ridge. At dawn on the morning of April 9th the unit went over the top and reached its objective on the Lens-Arras Road near Thelus early that day. The next day the Battalion moved up to the crest of the ridge and on the afternoon of the 13th descended the eastern slope near the village of Vimy and advanced on to the open plain beyond. That night the unit was relieved and returned over miles of former enemy territory for a well-earned rest.

It was early in the morning of April 9th that the first Victoria Cross in the 4th Brigade was won by Lance-Sergeant Ellis W. Sifton of the 18th Battalion. Having located an enemy machine gun, which was holding up his company, he charged it single-handed, killing all the crew. He succeeded in keeping off a small enemy party until our men had gained the position but, unfortunately, in carrying out this gallant act he was killed. "His conspicuous valour undoubtedly saved many lives and contributed largely to the success of the operation."

The Battalion was again in action at Fresnoy in May 1917, at Hill 70 in August and at Passchendaele in November.

After Passchendaele the Battalion returned to the Lens sector where it remained during the winter of 1917-18. A few days after the opening of the great German offensive on March 21st, 1918, the 2nd Division was rushed south to help stem the tide of onrushing Germans on the 3rd Army front, where the Battalion remained until July 1st when the division was returned to the Canadian Corps.

Then followed the last hundred days of the war:—

August 1918	—	Amiens to Arras
September	—	Drocourt-Queant Line
October	—	Canal de l'Escout, Cambrai, Iwuy, Sensee Marshes
November	—	Valenciennes, Ciply, Mons
November 11th	—	The Armistice

On November 18th, 1918, the march into Germany began and on December 13th, with bayonets fixed and colours flying, the Battalion crossed the Rhine at Bonn.

The unit was stationed at Hennef, eight miles east of the river, and remained part of the Army of Occupation for six weeks, being relieved at the end of January 1919 by the 2nd/4th Queens.

The Battalion returned to London, Ontario, about 650 strong, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel L. E. Jones, C.M.G., D.S.O., on Saturday, May 24th, 1919, and was demobilized at Carling Heights on that date. Of the original unit 16 officers and 90 other ranks returned to Canada with the Battalion.